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VISITING AFGHANS GRATIFIED BY U.S. SUPPORT (780)  
(June 16 colloquium concluding U.S. visit)

By Jim Shevis  
USIA Staff Writer

Washington -- Sarajuddin Jiddi, one of seven highly placed Afghan refugees who have just concluded a four-week visit to the United States, summed up the group's feeling this way:

"The most important feature of our trip was to see the people and the government of the United States supporting our cause.

"Americans love freedom," said Jiddi, his remarks translated by an interpreter, "and because they love freedom, they support freedom for other countries."

Director of the advisory board of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA), Jiddi said his first visit to the United States also served to disabuse him of some misconceptions about American society. Others, who were here for the first time also, said the same in a June 16 colloquium.

"We had heard of racial discrimination in the United States," he said, "but at the Martin Luther King Center (for Nonviolent Social Change) in Atlanta we saw otherwise." Nor, he said, did he see discrimination in Washington, the nation's capital.

The visit to Atlanta, where the group discussed civil rights, voter registration and equal educational opportunity, was one of eight stopovers. Others were in Charlottesville, Virginia; Sacramento, San Francisco and Berkeley in California; Omaha, Nebraska; New York and Washington.

The trip was part of USIA's International Visitors Program, designed to give representatives of foreign nations an opportunity to observe and study U.S. society and Americans a chance to learn about their countries. The Afghan refugees, who represented different Afghan resistance groups based in Pakistan and private voluntary organizations (PVOs), focused on U.S. political processes and institutions.

Members of the group were Mohammad Naim Farahi, Tooryalai Zazai and Jiddi of NIFA; Nasrulla Safi of the Writers Union of Free Afghanistan; Abdul Qadir Zambale, military commander of the Itihad Party and tribal chief of Helmand Province; Obaidullah, coordinator of an agronomy project in Afghanistan supported by Mercy Corps International, and Akbar Taniwal, deputy director of Avicen, a French PVO active in medical relief for Afghans.

After three days in Washington, where they studied U.S. government structures and the political system, the group went to Charlottesville where Professor A.E. Dick Howard of the University of Virginia described the origins of the U.S. Constitution and the implications of forming a similar document today.

Howard, who is one of the leading constitutional scholars in the United States, left deep impressions on the group judging from their comments.

Nowhere in the world has democracy reached its optimal stage, Taniwal noted, yet the U.S. Constitution is the cornerstone of

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American democracy.

"Your constitution is for the people of the United States," he said. "The people respect the Constitution. You select your representatives and the people are watching....If the people see any wrongdoing, they can remove them from power."

Zazai, who was secretary of Afghanistan's ministry of water and power before joining NIFA as its publications head, said, "We realize you had a lot of problems when you gained your freedom from the British. Yet you succeeded in writing a constitution...and democracy has lasted more than 200 years" in the United States.

"We hope there'll come a day soon when the people of Afghanistan are free," said Farahi, NIFA political adviser and chief of the Noorzai tribe in Afghanistan's Farah province.

"When we get our freedom, we hope to use these democratic processes in our system and society."

While in Sacramento, the group saw the California state legislature in action and had an opportunity to see how its laws are enacted. They also studied the structure and functions of the legislature and the powers of the state vis-a-vis the federal government.

"The fact that each state has its own constitution tells you a lot about the roots of the constitutional system," Safi said.

"The people's will and wishes must be taken into consideration in launching a constitutional government," he said.

"Once we've obtained a free Afghanistan, we look forward to having this system in our country."

In Washington, just three days before their departure, the seven attended a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on development of U.S. policy in Afghanistan.

Republican Senator Gordon J. Humphrey of New Hampshire, a strong supporter of the Afghan mujahidin, noted President Bush's recent reaffirmation of the U.S. commitment to the resistance forces. Humphrey added:

"The massive sacrifice on the part of the Afghan people makes it a moral imperative for the United States and Pakistan to continue to seek genuine self-determination for Afghanistan."

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